

Public Agenda Pack



Notice of Meeting of

LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORK - EXMOOR

Thursday, 7 March 2024 at 7.00 pm

The Moorland Hall - Cutcombe, Wheddon Cross TA24 7DL

To: The members of the Local Community Network - Exmoor

Chair: Councillor Steven Pugsley
Vice-chair: Councillor Mike Ellicott (Exford PC)
Somerset Cllr Frances Nicholson

| | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Brompton Ralph PC | Brompton Regis PC | Brushford PC |
| Clatworthy PC | Cutcombe PC | Dulverton PC |
| Exford PC | Exmoor PC | Exton PC |
| Huishchamplower PC | Luccombe PC | Luxborough PC |
| Oare PM | Porlock PC | Selworthy & Minehead WO PC |
| Skilgate PC | Timberscombe PC | Treborough PM |
| Upton PC | Winsford PC | Withypool & Hawkridge PC |
| Wootton Courtenay PC | | |

Cllr Dixie Darch (Lead Member for Environment & Climate Change)

Somerset Highways

Somerset Community Council Village Agents

Avon and Somerset Exmoor Neighbourhood Policing Team

Exmoor National Park Authority

Exmoor Young Voices

Exmoor Hill Farming Network

Connect Somerset / Minehead Eye

For further information about the meeting, including how to join the meeting virtually, please contact Sam Murrell sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk.

All members of the public are welcome to attend our meetings and ask questions or make a statement **by giving advance notice** in writing or by e-mail to the Monitoring Officer at email: democraticserviceteam@somerset.gov.uk by **5pm on Friday, 1 March 2024**.

The LCN team want everybody to have the opportunity to take part in the LCN meetings and have booked appropriate venues with accessibility requirements in mind. If you have specific access needs, and are at all concerned, please contact the LCN Team so they can provide reassurance or seek solutions beforehand: lcn@somerset.gov.uk.

Issued by David Clark (the Proper Officer) on Wednesday, 28 February 2024

AGENDA

Local Community Network - Exmoor - 7.00 pm Thursday, 7 March 2024

Core Membership (Pages 5 - 6)

Click here to join the online meeting (Pages 7 - 8)

1 Apologies for Absence

To receive any apologies for absence.

2 Declarations of Interest

To receive and note any declarations of interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The other registrable interests of Councillors of Somerset Council, arising from membership of City, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes: [City, Town & Parish Twin Hatters - Somerset Councillors 2023](#))

3 Public Question Time

The Chair to advise of any questions, statements or petitions received that are not covered by items on the agenda for the meeting on which members of the public have requested to speak.

4 Notes from the Previous Meeting (Pages 9 - 20)

To approve the notes from the previous meeting.

5 Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting

To discuss matters arising from the notes not covered in later agenda items.

6 Avon and Somerset Police

To receive an update from PCSO Michelle Haines on local neighbourhood beat matters.

7 To receive an update on the proposed plans for the Dulverton Recycling Centre (Pages 21 - 24)

Cllr Dixie Darch, Lead Member for Environment and Climate Change will be in attendance, supported by Kirsty Larkins, Service Director for Climate and sustainability.

8 Civil Contingencies - Places of Safety and Community Resilience Grants

A presentation by Nicola Dawson, Civil Contingencies Manager on Community Places of Safety, and community resilience funding/grants.

9 Exmoor Highways Sub-group Update (Pages 25 - 36)

To include the following matters:-

- A letter to parishes was circulated on the 26 February 2024, advising of the current Highway Service options available.
- The draft notes from the Highways sub-group of the 23 February 2024.
- An update on the B3224 Roundwaters Scheme – A further public meeting to be held on Wednesday 13 March at the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe. Doors open at 7pm for a 7.30pm start.

10 Exmoor National Park Authority

11 Dates of Future Meetings

| Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe | Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date – Dulverton Sports Pavilion |
|--|---|
| Thursday 7 March 2024 at 7pm | Friday 19 April 2024, at 10am. |
| Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7pm – special meeting. (Not hybrid) | |
| AGM – Thursday 6 June 2024 at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed | |

Core Membership

Unitary Councillors:

Councillor Frances Nicholson

Councillor Steven Pugsley

City, Town and Parish Councils (one voting member from each):

Brompton Ralph

Brompton Regis

Brushford

Clatworthy

Cutcombe

Dulverton

Exford

Exmoor

Exton

Huish Champflower

Luccombe

Luxborough

Minehead Without

Oare

Porlock

Selworthy

Skilgate

Timberscombe

Treborough

Upton

Winsford

Withypool and Hawkridge

Wootton Courtenay

Other Stakeholders (one voting member from each):

Avon and Somerset Police

NHS

Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue

Education

Spark Somerset

Society Local Council Clerks

Somerset Association Local Councils

Somerset Activity Sports Partnership

Community Council for Somerset

Citizens Advice
Department of Work and Pensions
Somerset Rivers Authority
Somerset Local Nature Partnership
Business Chamber
Exmoor National Park
Exmoor Young Voices
The Hill Farming Network
Somerset Skills and Learning
Visit Exmoor
West Somerset Flood Group
Home Start West Somerset
Onion Collective
Sustrans

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Local Community Network Meeting Notes

Meeting Title: Local Community Network - Exmoor

Date: Thursday, 11 January 2024

Time: 7.12 pm - 9.10 pm

Location: The Moorland Hall - Cutcombe, Wheddon Cross TA24 7DL

Chaired by: Steven Pugsley (Chair)

LCN core membership attendance:

| Name: | Representing |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Mike Ellicott (Vice Chair) | Exford Parish Council |
| Cllr Frances Nicholson | Somerset Council |
| Andrew Sellick | Brompton Ralph PC |
| Sarah Buchanan (clerk) | Brompton Regis PC |
| Jan Aldridge (clerk) | Brushford PC |
| Sally Moran | Clatworthy PC |
| Jon Levenson | Cutcombe PC |
| Christine Dubery | Dulverton TC |
| Rebecca Tomalin (clerk) | Exmoor PC |
| Janette Sapsford | Exton PC |
| Stephen Kimsey | Huishchampflower PC |
| Duncan McCannlis | Porlock PC |
| Roger Webber | Selworthy & Minehead Without |
| Dan Barber | Skilgate PM |
| Katy Attwater | Timberscombe PC |
| Jennifer Yates (clerk) | Winsford PC |
| PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams | Avon & Somerset Police |
| Nikki Bonner (Village Agent) | Community Council Somerset (CCS) |
| Rev David Weir | Exmoor Benefice |

Officer attendance:

Name:

Jeff Brown – Interim LCN Lead Officer
Pip Hughes – Interim LCN Officer
Sam Murrell – Interim LCN Officer
Tom Parkinson – ICT Specialist
Kevin Bridgwater – Highways Manager
Kali Martin – Area Highways Office

Representing

Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council
Somerset Council

Other attendees:

Name:

Mark Shelford, (PCC)
Patricia Bainbridge (clerk)
Norma Martin (clerk)
Roger Foxwell
Stephen Colson
Scilla Barney
Peter Bate
Lesley Webb (clerk)
PCSO Michelle Haines
Stephen Grice (Village agent)
Philip Beauvais

Representing

Avon and Somerset Police CC
Brompton Ralph PC
Clatworthy PC
Cutcombe PC
Porlock PC
Selworthy & Minehead Without
Holnicote Tenants / National Trust / MOP
Timberscombe PC
Avon and Somerset Police
Community Council Somerset (CCS)
Skilgate PM

Virtual attendees:

Name:

Nick Thwaites
Colin Wilkins
Julian Soltau
Will Lock
Peter Stenner
Charles O Connor
Beccy Brown – Employment & Skills

Representing

Dulverton TC
Winsford PC
Withypool & Hawkridge PC
Exmoor Young Voices
Member of the Public
Exmoor Parish Council
Somerset Council

Summary of discussion:

Agenda Summary of key points of discussion and outcome: Action by:
item:

Item 40: **Introductions and opening comments**

The Chair advised that as the Police Crime Commissioner, Mark

Shelford was running late, he would take later items on the agenda first.

He also welcomed Peter Bate from Holincote Estate to the meeting. Peter was attending as a member of the public but representing the Holincote Estate (National Trust) tenants.

Item 41: **Apologies for Absence**

Julian Soltau (Withypool PC) who attended virtually, Andrew Bray (Wootton Courtenay PC), Margaret Rawle (Dulverton TC), Somerset Executive Member for Transformation and Resources – Cllr Theo Butt Philip, Colin McDonald (SC Rural Hsg Enabler), Sally Baker (Brompton Ralph PC), Ruth McArthur (ENPA).

Item 42: **Declarations of Interest**

None were declared.

Item 43: **Public Question Time**

There were no public questions or statements presented in advance of the meeting.

Item 44: **Notes from the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as a true record and unanimously agreed.

Item 45: **Update on Actions from the Previous Meeting**

Neither of the subgroups have had a chance to meet since the last meeting in November, but this was mainly due to the financial emergency and parishes having to concentrate their limited time and resource on setting their precepts.

Colin McDonald had spoken to the Chair and was collating the required data to enable the Housing sub-group to progress. Meetings would be diarised shortly.

Other items of concern such as the Roundwaters update would be discussed later in the meeting.

Item 46: **Somerset Council Financial Update**

This item was brought forward as the Police Crime Commissioner had been delayed.

Unfortunately the Lead Member for Resources and Transformation, Cllr Theo Butt Philip had tendered his apologies. In his absence, Cllr Pugsley provided a summary of concerns which were that the LCN members are worried about the impact of the financial challenges faced by Somerset Council on their local services and communities. They want to know what services will be withdrawn and how much they will cost to provide locally.

They were aware that the proposed cuts would affect highways, winter maintenance (including filling of grit bins), street cleaning, recycling centres, libraries and CCTV provision. If the parishes within the LCN decided to take on some of these services they wanted to have a fair formula for sharing the costs, which would be a reflection on their respective populations and geography.

It was considered frustrating that there was no financial information forthcoming from Somerset Council, which would assist the parishes in setting their precepts. Some of the parishes had decided not to wait any longer (Dulverton TC) and had already decided their precept that week. Others were making provision to increase their precept to cover service devolution if it was required.

Jon Levenson (Cutcombe PC) expressed bitter disappointment that the financial figures were not available to assist the parishes with the setting of the precept and stated that it was a sign of Somerset Council's financial collapse and poor fiscal management. It was no wonder that the Council found itself in such a financial crisis.

Comment was made that some of the services such as public conveniences, maintenance of play areas and grass cutting had already been devolved to the Exmoor parishes by the former West Somerset Council. There weren't many other services left to cut. Concern was also expressed about the lack of skills, time and resource at parish level which would be required to run

some of the services. Parish Councillors were volunteers and it was difficult enough to recruit to the roles, without the additional responsibility of managing staff!

Other areas of concern that were expressed:-

- The possible closure of the Dulverton recycling centre which would result in increased fly-tipping.
- The cost of the democratic process in Somerset Council and maintaining and paying for 110 councillors.
- The loss of the library, bus service and street cleaner in Porlock if the costs were too prohibitive to take on by the parish.
- The Somerset Council proposed council tax increase of 9.9% during a cost-of-living crisis.
- the lack of financial clarity due to “commercial sensitivity” and a perceived unwillingness to share information.
- Asset devolution – the burden of paying the legal fees would fall on the parish council.

Attendees were reminded that the budget consultation had been launched and would close on 22 January. [The survey and further information on how to participate can be found on this link.](#)

Cllr Pugsley highlighted that collectively as an LCN, most of the parishes were concerned with highways issues around:-

- the filling of grit bins/ supply of salt bags;
- clearing of drains/gullies; and
- verge maintenance (grass cutting etc).

He suggested that cuts in these services would most affect the Exmoor parishes, and it was important that the Exmoor LCN tried at least to mitigate this.

It was yet to be decided whether the Exmoor LCN wished to proceed with the revised Highway Steward model, and discussions were due to take place about possibly sharing the service with a neighbouring LCN area.

Cllr Pugsley agreed to take away these suggestions and follow up with the devolution team on the best way forward.

Item 47: **Annual Update from the Avon & Somerset Police Crime Commissioner, Mark Shelford**

The police and crime commissioner, Mark Shelford, reported on the achievements and challenges of the police force, such as the increase in charge rates for violence against women and girls, the cross-border operations to tackle rural crime, and the budget and precept survey.

A written report is attached.

Cllr Frances Nicholson welcomed bringing the Seahorse Centre in Minehead back into use, and the provision of a tri-partite hub. It would be used to house the neighbourhood policing team, NHS trainee nursing staff and some Somerset Council services.

Concern was expressed about the loss of CCTV provision across the county. Mark Shelford advised that in the main it was run by volunteers after an initial capital investment in the equipment by the Council. He had yet to have conversations with Somerset Council on the implications of standing down the service, and the proposed alternatives. He agreed that it played a massive part in crime prevention and community reassurance.

Unconfirmed reports had been circulating about drug use taking place in West Somerset College. Mark Shelford stated that sadly drug use was happening everywhere in the present day, but it should be reported to the local neighbourhood team as soon as possible. They would gather intelligence which would then inform how they responded to such crime.

PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams stated that the local team had a very good relationship with the West Somerset College. They held weekly beat surgeries so that the students could drop in during break times and share any concerns or worries. They also organised presentations from visiting groups on such subjects as knife-crime, drug misuse and county lines. Year 10 at West Somerset College are about to have a talk on Child Exploitation which will also be rolled out to the two middle schools. This will raise awareness of the main issues, and the staff will also receive training. The team were not aware of any recent reports of drug misuse at the College, but they were

watchful and would treat any information sensitively.

The PCC reminded the Exmoor LCN that he did have the Police Community Trust Fund available to provide funding for community initiatives. This could include Speed Indicator Devices (SIDS). [The link to more information on these funding streams can be found here.](#)

Item 48: **Avon and Somerset Neighbourhood Policing Update**

PCSO Supervisor Katherine Williams and PCSO Michelle Haines were present at the meeting to provide an update on local neighbourhood matters.

Its been another busy quarter, with day to day work, finishing off the Mini Police project which was well received and attending our local Christmas events.

Crime update since November

There has been a marked increase in our crime figures due to an issue in Dulverton. This is currently under investigation so unable to discuss further – however there has been a marked improvement in the last 3 weeks.

Incidents of note: -

- 22/11 Theft of grabber from trailer, Timberscombe
- 22/11 Engine stolen from Dunster
- 8/12 Burglary Wheddon Cross – Property recovered out of force area (assisted by trackers fitted)
- 18/12 Att. Burglary Brushford – no entry gained
- 04/01 Burglary – non dwelling, Porlock – nothing stolen
- Theft of Quadbike Exebridge.

There has also been a report of deer remains found at Simonsbath and some incidents of quad and off road bikes being used at 2 places on the moor (Hopcott woods and Simonsbath). If registration numbers are taken, ASP will follow up. They will be having a meeting shortly with the Exmoor Rangers to discuss some joint action.

Going forward

Increase in Farm Visits -promoting farm watch and visiting existing members.

Funded SelectaDNA marker kits – Follow up visits to rural victims of crime giving advice and supplying marker kits – again promoting farm watch.

Monthly visits to continue to Cutcombe Market and hopefully another trailer marking session.

From March ASP will be visiting accommodation providers (hotels/camping) with information for visitors reminding them not to leave property in their vehicles when visiting the moors – repeating last year’s efforts which resulted in only one reported theft last season.

Pop up police posts in villages – hour sessions available for advice and cycle marking.

Organising attendance at country fairs.

In association with the Talking Café / Village Agents

The Police will be attending the Dulverton Talking café with the Village agents to raise awareness around mental health issues. These take place on Thursdays in Dulverton. Nikki Bonner (village agent) advised that on the 15 February, representatives from Somerset Mind service would be offering help and support at that particular Talking Café.

Cllr Frances Nicholson commended the collaborative work taking place and the multi-agency approach to raise awareness around mental health support.

The officers were thanked for their time and attendance at the meeting. The appreciation was marked with a round of applause.

Following their update, the PCC and the officers left the meeting.

Item 49: Exmoor LCN Highways Subgroup Update

Clarification was sought on a Government funding headline which stated that 8 billion pounds was earmarked for repairing potholes. Kali Martin advised that the figure was misleading, as

it was to be implemented over 11 years and was shared across the south of England including London. (This had been earmarked for 2.8 billion alone).The calculations on how the sum would be distributed would be determined on the length of the road networks in each county. It was very much a headline figure and the reality would be very different.

The Roundwaters scheme has started and will be monitored and updated regularly. Weekly updates were going to be circulated, and it was asked if they could be sent to the Link Officer for wider distribution. The first couple of weeks had seen the BT masts moved, vegetation clearance completed and Walters (the contractor) move their logistical equipment to the site. They had also carried out preparatory work at the base of the ravine. This would involve diverting the watercourse and carrying out water protection measures. There were some signage issues reported but these were picked up very quickly by Ross and dealt with accordingly.

Cllr Pugsley commented that he hoped another public meeting update would take place in February, but in the meantime the team would do their best to get out regular updates.

Cllr Ellicott said that he was aware there were some issues with the aggregates expected by the landowners (Tuckers), and this had not gone as smoothly as hoped for.

There had been some incidents with vehicles trying to access the smaller “no access” roads, and getting stuck, and the Highways team were keeping a close eye on it. They would review any closures or signage and tweak as necessary.

The **Winter Maintenance** situation is tricky due to ageing gritters and the high demand for pothole repairs. This reactive maintenance caused by the wet followed by freezing weather (creating potholes) has caused the planned maintenance programmes to fall behind schedule. Potholes have to be repaired as a matter of urgency but there are currently 1100 outstanding reports on the portal.

With the demand this creates, coupled with the need for the drivers to work within working time guidelines, it has impacted on other highway service areas.

The aging gritter fleet has caused problems due to breakdowns, and the team are doing their best to grit/salt the green routes within the capability of what machinery is available. They are also doing their best to source other gritters and equipment and approaches are being made to the rural community by the contractor (Milestone) to assist if possible. The situation was described as “tenuous” with the hope that really severe weather (snow) was not predicted at present. The team would be monitoring the weather forecasts very closely over the coming weeks, and if necessary gritting in anticipation of the cold temperatures.

Some other issues were mentioned specific to Skilgate and Timberscombe, but these were to be picked up outside of the meeting. Timberscombe, once again, requested an update from Highways regarding the remedial work which needs to be undertaken in Great House Street. Highways responded that they have yet to read the survey undertaken in September.

Salt bags were to be dropped in Timberscombe and Hawkridge as a remedial short-term fix for flooding/freezing on the Highway. Kali Martin agreed to follow this up outside of the meeting.

The Chair formally thanked Kevin and Kali for their frank and honest report about the winter maintenance service, and highlighting the challenges currently faced.

The **devolved funding jetting scheme** has been mostly completed and feedback was requested. (There are still a few parishes awaiting a visit, but this was due to the sub-contractor being pulled away on emergency response work). In the main, there had been mixed feedback from the respective parishes. They unanimously agreed that the work was of a satisfactory standard and well received. The main concern was ongoing maintenance and the fact that there was still a lot of work outstanding. It was unlikely this was all going to be completed as the budget was limited. Christine Dubery was formally thanked for all her hard work in getting this work delivered and liaising with the sub-contractor and highway wardens.

It was agreed that when the final jetting requests had been signed off, Sam Murrell and Christine Dubery would liaise on collating the various reports and feed them back to the Highways team. Any issues that were beyond the scope of the jetting operative could be picked up and assessed at a later date. Sam and Christine also agreed to assess the project and discuss what had worked well for the Exmoor LCN devolved funding. A report would be handed back to the Highways subgroup for comment, and then forwarded onto the LCN team. The Chair acknowledged that this had been a very useful collective exercise, and provided an example of what the LCN could administer when one parish council agreed to act as a collator of funds. (In this case Dulverton Town Council).

Item 50: **Exmoor National Park Authority**

The park did not send a representative to the meeting, which was criticised by some attendees. There were questions and concerns about the park's budget, the various grant projects and broadband provision.

The Parish Consultative Forum will continue to meet twice a year, which is a reduction in meetings. The Chair (Cllr Mike Ellicott) said it was important that members actively participated and brought forward items for the agenda so that the meetings could be properly managed and facilitated. The last meeting in November had been cancelled due to a perceived lack of business from the parishes.

It was requested that a representative from the ENPA attended the next meeting in March to provide an overview of recent projects.

Item 51: **Dates of Future Meetings**

The date of the next LCN meeting is the 7 March at the Moorland Hall, Cutcombe. A request was made to invite Matt Barrow (Connecting Devon and Somerset) and ensure a ENPA representative was present. Somerset Prepared are already scheduled on the agenda.

| Exmoor LCN Date - The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe | Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date - Dulverton Sports Pavilion |
|--|---|
| Thursday 11 January 2024 at 7pm | Friday 23 February 2024, at 10am |
| Thursday 7 March 2024 at 7pm | Friday 19 April 2024, at 10am. |
| Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7pm * | |

Dates of the Housing and Economic Development subgroups to be confirmed.

*The meeting of 9 May has now been reinstated and will be the final meeting before the Annual General Meeting.

Contact officer for meeting: Sam [Murrell sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:sam.murrell@somerset.gov.uk) or Exmoorlcn@somerset.gov.uk.



(For web)

29 Jan 2024

Dear Clerks

We know some of you had questions about the fact the Council is considering proposals to make a potential £960,000 saving in Waste Services over the next two years. And in particular, the impact any possible cuts will have on our current recycling centre offer.

For clarity, no recycling centres will close overnight following the budget setting meeting at Full Council (which is due to take place on February 20). The local authority must seek the views of residents through proper consultation beforehand. So, there will be ample opportunity for communities to have a say, and their voices heard. In the meantime, commercial negotiations with our contractors Biffa, are ongoing.

Below is a list of FAQs about recycling centres, which we hope will provide additional assurances. These will be posted online shortly on our City, Town, and Parish Council page: www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/city-town-and-parish-councils/

Those of you who placed specific questions and queries in the Teams Chat about the budget and/or the devolution of assets and services, will be responded to shortly. Do remember to use our dedicated email inbox for your bespoke enquiries devolution@somerset.gov.uk

Thank you for your continued engagement and patience during these financially challenging times.

Sent on behalf of

Alyn Jones

Executive Director

Strategy Workforce & Localities

Budget setting: February 2024

Recycling Centres

Q: Why are you considering the closure of recycling sites?

It is estimated that around a third of local authorities are considering recycling site closures to balance their budgets. In Somerset we know the closure of any site would have an impact on our residents and communities. We will be doing our best to make savings while limiting those impacts as much as possible. None of the savings options being considered are things we want to be doing. All are very difficult and unpalatable. But we are in a financial emergency and savings have to be made across the board, including in our Waste Services. If we cannot set a balanced budget, Government commissioners will be sent in and will do it for us - without the local knowledge or interest in minimising the impact.

Q: Why not allow people to pay to use recycling sites?

The law states that local authorities must help residents dispose of their waste in a responsible way – and for free. So, this isn't allowed, legally. We did this previously on a number of sites to avoid closure, but this option now removed by Government, through statute in 2020.

Q: Could Biffa (or another contractor) offer a service directly to communities, without council involvement?

In theory, yes. But this is something they would need to make work for them. Recycling sites are complex businesses and expensive to run. Any contractor would be looking to recoup its costs.

Q: Is there a legal maximum distance that people can be expected to travel to access a recycling centre?

We are not aware of any legal maximum distances. However, there are equalities and access responsibilities local authorities must take into account when making changes to some service provisions.

Q: Will there be a risk of extra fly-tipping if you close recycling centres?

Fly-tipping is an environmental a crime. Everyone has a responsibility to dispose of all their rubbish legally and properly. If site closures are approved they would be well advertised and alternatives publicised, along with the penalties of fly-tipping. However, we know through experience that fly-tipping tends to be conducted by rogue traders - often working out of their own area, trying to avoid the disposal costs that they would have to pay if they used a tip - and not by local householders who value their local environment.

Q: How have you identified the recycling centres earmarked for possible closure?

This was based on initial calculations of costs to the council per visit and per tonne of waste, and what we could potentially save, allowing us to deliver the most amount of savings whilst having an impact on the fewest people. The sites at risk could change, depending on the outcome of commercial negotiations with our contractor. We understand that any site closures will have an impact on the surrounding community, but we have to make savings and help the council balance its budget.

Q: Why name sites before proposals have been finalised?

We named Castle Cary, Cheddar, Crewkerne, Dulverton and Williton to be transparent and avoid speculation. We know there is a lot of interest and concern, and wanted to be open and honest about the work so far.

Q: When would consultation happen?

If a decision is taken to move this option forward there would be further consultation, and we would look to start that process as soon as possible. At this stage we don't have any details, but were it to happen, consultation would include the public, key stakeholders, partners, plus engagement with city, town and parish councils, as we seek to understand the impacts.

Q: When could a decision be taken to close recycling sites – what's the timeline?

No recycling sites will close overnight following the budget-setting meeting of Full Council (due to place on 20 February). We don't have the dates yet, but if the savings option is progressed there will be further consultation, with opportunities for people to share their views. The result of any consultations would need to be considered, and a further decision would need to be taken by the Executive Committee.

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Via email to:
All City, Town, and Parish Councils

All enquiries email:
devolution@somerset.gov.uk

Date: 26 February 2024

Dear Colleagues

Highway Maintenance Devolution - Options for local enhancement to routine highways maintenance services

Further to letters issued last year by the Leader of the council I am pleased to outline the options available to localities to enhance the level of highway service in their area; providing contact details to express an interest in the various initiatives which will become available over the next few months.

Following extensive budget consultation and Scrutiny process, the Council's Executive Board heard concerns about the potential impact of options for savings in highway services and agreed that localities need time to develop arrangements for any enhanced local delivery. The proposed highway savings were scaled back to around £200k which is a reduction of about 15% in terms of what we spend on grass cutting, gully emptying, hedge trimming and treating noxious weeds. The saving will not come into force until April 2025 to give time for local agreements to be reached.

Our services

Somerset Council is responsible for maintaining around 6,700km of carriageway and 2,600km of walkable footways across Somerset. We have a broad responsibility to ensure the network is maintained and safe and we aim to make sure we undertake timely repairs in line with our published policies on inspecting and maintaining the highway.

You can access these here: www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-travel-and-parking/highway-safety-inspections/

We spend in excess of £30m capital per year on maintaining the structure of the highway, through planned programmes such as re-surfacing, patching and reconstruction, and through reactive repairs to safety defects such as potholes.

We also have programmes for repair and renewal of aging assets such as street lighting, traffic signals and maintaining, repairing, and strengthening structures such as bridges, culverts and retaining walls.

This type of work is usually funded through our capital grants from Government.

We also operate area highways offices and undertake routine planned maintenance to keep people safe on our networks, such as cutting the grass for improved visibility, the emptying of gullies to prevent flooding, jetting drains, treating noxious weeds, and ensuring any signs and lines related to highway safety, are legible.

We currently spend about £4.7m on this type of activity (excluding winter and emergency service, rights of way and highway lighting).

As these are 'services' rather than construction works, they are typically funded from Council Tax.

Some of this work is 'planned maintenance' and is scheduled in each year (such as grass cutting and gully emptying), and some of the work is undertaken reactively, in response to issues being identified by our inspectors or the public (such as blocked drains).

Planned maintenance (explained)

We operate a planned maintenance programme for cleaning highway surface water drains on all the roads we maintain. How often we do this depends on where they are (the classification of the road) and the relative risk of flooding.

- Gullies in flood susceptible areas will be cleaned every year
- Gullies in rural non-flood susceptible areas (outside a 30mph or 40mph speed limit) will be cleaned every two years
- Gullies in urban non-flood susceptible areas (inside a 30 or 40mph speed limit) will be cleaned every four years

Another planned maintenance activity is cutting certain areas of grass on the A and B roads which we do twice a year at agreed locations where long grass would otherwise cause safety issues such as lack of visibility of oncoming traffic.

The planned programme is reviewed and adjusted each year to respond to the changing nature of risk and flooding on the county's road network.

Reactive maintenance (explained)

In addition to our planned maintenance programmes, we also currently budget for reactive work which is where issues (such as blocked drains or overgrown hedges) are identified by our inspectors or reported to us by communities. Where defects or flooding are identified, outside the planned programmes, these will be dealt with as necessary.

Changes arising from the recent budget setting process

As part of our response to the financial emergency, the highways service plans to reduce our budget for reactive maintenance activity such as hedge trimming, gully emptying, drain jetting and treating noxious weeds. The budget will reduce from April 2025.

We will still undertake our planned programmes but will have less funding to react to issues as they arise. Although please note that we will always address those issues which present an immediate safety hazard.

| Changes to Highway Maintenance Services | | | | |
|---|---------------|----------------------------|----------|---|
| Highway Maintenance Activity | 23/24 | 24/25 | 25/26 | Status |
| Maintenance of structures such as bridges and retaining walls | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Continuing unchanged |
| Road and footpath patching, resurfacing and surface dressing | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Continuing unchanged |
| Repairing safety defects such as potholes. | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Continuing unchanged |
| Planned grass cutting programme | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Continuing unchanged |
| Planned gully emptying programme | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Continuing unchanged |
| Replenishment of grit bins when notified they are empty | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | Continuing unchanged |
| Reactive response to blocked gullies, drains and ditches. | ✓ | ✓ | Reducing | Budget reducing from April 2025. Urgent safety-related issues will still be dealt with. |
| Reactive response to overgrown hedges | ✓ | ✓ | Reducing | |
| Reactive response to presence of noxious weeds | ✓ | ✓ | Reducing | |
| Local delivery options such as highway steward, self-delivery, and parish price list. | Not available | Available from summer 2024 | ✓ | Aiming for as wide a take-up as possible by 25/26. |

We would like to work with our City, Town, and Parish Councils during the coming few months to get ready for this change in our services and enable you to consider providing an enhanced level of service in your locality, either through undertaking or ordering certain agreed types of works yourselves, or through buying-back an agreed level of service.

Initiatives Available

We are putting in place a range of measures which will enable enhanced local delivery and would like to put in place as many local arrangements as possible prior to budgets reducing in 25/26.

Highways Steward

This is a skilled operative in a branded vehicle, who visits parishes and towns to a defined works programme, with priorities determined by the City, Town and Parish but is also empowered to undertake ad-hoc works when identified.

They would not undertake statutory safety related work such as repairing potholes or dealing with damaged regulatory signs etc. which would still be undertaken by Somerset Council, however they will be able to identify this type of issue and ensure action is taken through the appropriate channels.

They would be able to undertake activity such as verge maintenance, highway surface water drainage maintenance, weed removal, sign cleaning and cutting back vegetation.

A Highways Steward can be supplied by the Council's highways contractor Kier Transportation subject to the locality confirming funding to cover the cost annually. A single Highways Steward with a vehicle, all tools and equipment, costs £50,000 per annum.

There is potential for local councils across Somerset to buy into this service, which would bring the additional benefit of close links with the highways service and would address concerns about taking on health and safety and insurance obligations.

There is flexibility in how the service is commissioned; no minimum number of Stewards, and contracts can start from April 1st or at any time during the year. The minimum contract length is one year, and each Steward needs to be fully funded to work in a workable geographic area.

It is possible for a parish to 'buy' one whole Steward for their individual parish, or to pool resources with a local cluster of parishes within an LCN area, or consider a full time or a half time Steward for their parish or cluster, sharing the other half with a neighbouring parish cluster or LCN area.

If you would like to register your interest in the Highways Steward scheme, please contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing '**Highways Steward**' in the subject line of your email. This will allow Somerset Council to sensibly gauge and co-ordinate interest across the county.

Local 'self-delivery'

A similar yet alternative scope of services to the Highways Steward scheme could be 'self-delivered' by localities, either through local suppliers commissioned by a Parish, or by Parish collaboration, or through a volunteer network.

Activities could include verge maintenance, drainage maintenance, weed removal, sign cleaning, vegetation clearance, tree and hedge cutting, minor repairs to non-regulatory signs etc.

Somerset Council is preparing a training package which will be available in the summer and enable people such as volunteers or locally skilled people to undertake agreed types of work safely in the vicinity of the highway with appropriate risk assessment.

People undertaking the work would need the correct insurance and Somerset Council will be able to provide advice on risk assessment, together with any permissions, licenses, traffic orders or temporary traffic signals needed.

If you'd like to learn more about this training, contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing **'Training'** in the subject line of your email.

Parish 'price list'

We are enabling City, Town, and Parish Councils to purchase highway maintenance services direct from our contractor Kier. Our contractor is preparing a parish price list and an ordering process for this.

The new Kier contract commences on 1 April 2024. Please be patient as it will take a couple of months to mobilise and set up the relevant processes for the parish price list. We currently envisage the price list and ordering process being available from Summer 2024, and services can commence shortly after this.

If you would like to express an interest in buying services from the parish price list, then please contact devolution@somerset.gov.uk placing **'Price List'** in the subject line of your email.

'Buying back'

There may be opportunities in the next City, Town and Parish precept round to raise funds and 'buy back' a level of service for a particular locality.

At present our budgets and programmes are planned on a countywide and area basis, so we recommend that localities wishing to buy back a level of service are better placed to do so in clusters.

It may be difficult for the Council to agree to a certain level of service for an isolated parish in a cost-effective way, due to the nature of how works are ordered, planned, and delivered. We therefore recommend that parishes work together through their Local Community Networks

(LCNs), preferably by setting up highways sub-groups, to discuss and agree any enhanced service delivery with our highway officers, (who can attend those sub-groups).

We have worked closely with Parish Councils through the Exmoor Pilot scheme to establish the value that highways sub-groups can have, and at the time of writing seven other LCNs have agreed to form such a group.

To ensure enhanced levels of service continue in your localities - over and above the basic offer – we will need our local Parishes to step forward and take on these tasks. To assist you in your decision-making, we've set up dedicated pages on our website. Please take the time to explore the resources. Bookmark the link, and don't forget to revisit it, as these pages are frequently updated.

You'll find the information here: www.somerset.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/city-town-and-parish-councils/.

Finally, please be assured that Somerset Council will remain responsible for the ownership and safe operation and maintenance of the highway network in your locality. We will continue to discharge our duty of care within available funding levels and in accordance with our published policies.

Reporting highway issues:

If you spot a specific highways risk that you want to report then the quickest way to report issues like this is through the 'report it' function on the Councils website, accessed from www.somerset.gov.uk/roads-and-transport/report-a-problem-on-the-road/ . This enables operatives on the ground to be notified quickly and efficiently, and you can track the progress of reported issues.

Yours sincerely



Mike O'Dowd-Jones
Service Director Infrastructure and Transport

**Minutes of the Exmoor LCN Pilot Highways Subgroup
Held on Friday 23 February 2024,
At Dulverton Sports Pavilion from 10.00am – 1.30pm**

Present:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Cllr Steven Pugsley (Chair) | Somerset Council (SC) |
| Cllr Frances Nicholson | SC |
| Mike Ellicott | Exford PC (Vice Chair LCN) |
| Luke Green | SC |
| Craig Gowan | SC |
| Kevin Bridgwater | SC |
| Kali Martin | SC |
| Patrick Watts Mabbott | Exmoor National Park |
| Christine Dubery / Margaret Rawle | Dulverton Town Council |
| Roger Foxwell | Cutcombe PC (Top Rep) |
| Sam Murrell (Interim LCN officer) | SC |
| Brenda Maitland Walker | WSFG (Guest) |

1. **Introduction**

Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker was welcomed to the meeting. Brenda is the vice chair of the Minehead and Watchet LCN, and chair of the West Somerset Flood Group (WSFG). The Minehead and Watchet LCN is keen to progress with a Highway working sub-group and is considering sharing the cost of a Highway Steward with Exmoor.

2. **Apologies**

Jeremy Hickman (Exford PC) Andrew Turner (SC), Paul Nation (SC), Andrew Bray (Vale Rep), Bev Norman (SC), Kate Brown (SC), Ross Matthews (SC), Pip Hughes (SC), Sarah Buchanan (Brendon Hills Rep).

3. **To review the Minutes and Action Points of the previous meeting on Friday 24 November 2023.**

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a true record.

Matters arising: -

- **Finger Post Spare Parts** – Luke Green had brought these with him and would hand them over to Patrick Watts-Mabbott following the meeting.
- **Exford Bridge** – Concern was expressed about the river undercutting the highway on the approach to the bridge. The Environment Agency had been contacted but had not progressed this. Brenda Maitland Walker advised that the WSFG could assist parishes in how to contact the relevant agencies, but it was really important that ongoing evidence (photographs) were provided to support the claim.
- **Tarr Steps Netting** – Nobody had progressed this since the last meeting so it was requested that enquiries were made at SC and ENPA as to who was responsible for repairing the netting. (If it could be set lower into the river it had more chance of catching the debris and protecting the stones).

4. **Exmoor LCN Highway priorities relating to the Financial Emergency**

- The filling of grit bins / supply of salt bags:
- Clearing of drains/gullies;
- Verge maintenance (grass cutting etc).

Somerset Council had set a balanced budget for 2024/25 without removing these services. It appeared that they were safe for at least a further 12 months. Cllr Pugsley advised that it was very likely that these would be revisited in the next financial year, so it would be prudent for parishes to start to prepare. Once the new contractors started in earnest on the highway maintenance, Somerset Council would be in a better position to provide accurate costings.

5. **Exmoor Ravine Update - B3224 Roundwater, Exford**

Another public meeting had been booked for the Moorland Hall on Wednesday 13 March 2024. Doors would open at 7pm and the meeting would commence at 7.30pm, chaired by Cllr Pugsley. The purpose of the public meeting would be to showcase the work that had already taken place and ask questions of the contractor and bridges team.

The parish representatives said they were pleased with the progress of the scheme and the professionalism shown by Walters. Site visits had taken place, and fortnightly updates were being circulated. Despite a machine breakdown, Walters had worked over a weekend to get the project back on schedule.

Winsford PC had raised some concerns and these were being addressed. Kali Martin had been in dialogue with Cllr Ian Brooks. The Highway subgroup discussed how to alleviate some of the problems arising on minor roads because of the increased traffic. Luke Green agreed to investigate this prior to the public meeting. (TRO, SIDs and reducing rat-running). There were also some issues around verge maintenance and drainage because of the excess water run-off.

Larcombe Bend – some parish representatives had suggested reducing the “pinch point” on the bend and undertaking the necessary works whilst the road was closed. This would assist with traffic flow, as large vehicles had difficulty passing each other at this point. It was pointed out that prior to the Roundwater scheme being progressed, a full highway impact survey had been carried out which included traffic speed. The bend provided a natural traffic calming measure that had been built into the scheme. (If the road was widened, traffic speed would increase and would put pressure on the new carriageway structure at Roundwaters). It was agreed to look into a “fix” that did not involve engineering. (Possible signage warning “Oncoming traffic in the middle of the road”).

6. **Exmoor Pilot Update**

- **Highway Steward Update** – Parishes were not prepared to sign up to the HS scheme until an established form of costing was established.

It was considered essential that the Highway Steward had good local knowledge and was adequately trained to operate on the Highway. Questions were raised about how his work would be scheduled and who would supervise and oversee the work programme.

The “best fit” for sharing the costs of a Highway Steward was with Minehead and Watchet as the neighbouring LCN. The smaller parishes were concerned about the costs and did not think it was affordable.

Christine Dubery said that it was unlikely that Dulverton Town Council would buy into the HS scheme as they were no longer continuing with managing the Parish Lengthsman. They would continue to employ the workman but would be running this independently.

Cllr Brenda Maitland Walker would feed these observations into the inaugural Minehead and Watchet LCN meeting which was due to take place on Friday 22 March at West Somerset House.

- **Existing Terms of Reference (TOR) and proposed amendments from March 31, 2024.**

As the Highways pilot TOR were tried and tested, it was agreed to refresh them for the purposes of the sub-group going forward. (Would need re-branding to Somerset Council etc). The proposed working group TOR that had been brought forward from the LCN team, were rejected. (Main reasons given were that it was not possible to provide a “free venue space with wifi” for each meeting. Parish clerks worked limited hours and would not be available for note taking).

- **Training of Volunteers**

Patrick Watts Mabbott asked if there had been any progress on the idea to train volunteers working on the network via an online portal. (This was mainly specific to Chapter 8 training). This would speed up the training process and reduce the bureaucracy. Luke Green agreed to follow this up.

Post meeting note: Luke advised that in discussions with Bev Norman, a suitable model has been identified which is currently used by Devon County Council. It is hoped to replicate this and roll it out across Somerset. (No timelines at present).

- **Devolved Funding – Progress to Date**

A breakdown of the funding allocation had been circulated prior to the meeting.

CAPITAL

- **Dulverton** – (High Street outside Acorn Antiques). Priority Give Way traffic management installation. Kate Brown is now progressing and awaiting costs. Some of the work (white lining has already been completed). It is hoped that this can be

finished before the 31 March to ensure payment in this financial year.

- **Cutcombe** – Traffic Regulation Order. This scheme has now been completed and the remainder of the costs have been paid from the Capital Devolved Funding budget. (Cutcombe PC had already paid a £900 deposit in advance of the works). The LCN had received a letter of thanks from Cutcombe PC acknowledging the grant.

REVENUE

Dulverton Town Council via the services of the sub-contractor Ian Woollacott had undertaken all but one of the parishes jetting requests. The project had worked to budget and there was a small amount left to cover the final clearance at Porlock Parish. Chris Dubery advised that a tough approach had been taken to ensure that all the service requests from the schedule were honoured. It had been hoped to serve subsequent requests if there was money remaining, but it looked unlikely that this would happen.

Christine and Dulverton TC were thanked for all their hard work in progressing the schedule. The management of the jetting project would not have taken place if Dulverton Town Council had not acted as the principal broker for the works, and accepted responsibility for the payment and handling of the finances. It was considered a “win” for the LCN way of working.

7. Winter Maintenance

Kevin and Kali said that thankfully conditions had been mild, and Exmoor had not had to deal with ice and snow to the extent of previous winters. Additional gritters had now been purchased and would hopefully be available for next winter. The main concern on the Somerset network was excess water, which had closed roads in other parts of the county.

8. Scheme Promotion / Review and Update

- The planned maintenance schedules had been provided in advance of the meeting. Craig advised that any outstanding work from the 2023/24 schedule would now be deferred until the new financial year but would have a delayed start date of June 2024. This was to allow completion of the Roundwaters Scheme.
- **Public Utility Works (LG)**
Luke Green advised that in light of the large capital scheme taking place on the B3224 at Roundwater, other utility schemes had been delayed minimising disruption on the network. These projects were currently backing up and would need to be rolled out in a timely way once the scheme was completed. Luke would bring a list of the projected works to the next sub-group meeting in April.

- **Traffic Management Schemes (KB)**

Kate was absent from the meeting but had submitted a written update on various projects coming forward in the new financial year: -

Brompton Regis

- Better signage for Wimbleball Lake (to be funded by SWLT)

Dulverton

- Awaiting kerb blip amendments and priority give way sign to be installed hope these will be delivered before end of March
- Kemps Way refresh lining old district council are looking at this

Dulverton/Winsford

- Horse warning signs in three different locations as per site visit with Margaret and Emma Wallace

Exford

- Implement signs and lines following change in speed limit and refresh other lining in village

Porlock

- Parking amendments in the main street to be advertised in March – plan will be sent to the Parish and County Councillors prior to advertising.
- Parking sign to go back up following accident and post being removed.
- Parsons Street parking issue in narrow part of the road to be investigated.

Upton

- SID post and some sign and line improvements

Withypool & Hawkridge

- Better signage to deter vehicles from heading to Tarr Steps from Hawkridge direction

9. **Recommendations to the Exmoor LCN (SP)**

- To continue with the Highways sub-group meetings beyond the life of the pilot scheme which is due to end on the 31 March 2024. This to be supported by the area parish representatives and the relevant Highways officers from Somerset Council. To update the existing pilot TOR and use as a model for the new Highway subgroup going forward.

- The Exmoor LCN considers working with the neighbouring LCN area of Minehead and Watchet to share the services of a Highway Steward. This to be evaluated once costs are known and the operational procedures are finalised.

10. **Any other Business**

The LCN meeting of the 9 May had been reinstated in the diary but would sit outside the normal cycle of LCN meetings. The main theme of this meeting would be to wind-up the Highways pilot and report on the success/lessons learnt. It was agreed that it would be an “in-person” meeting only and would not need the technical support usually provided.

The Exmoor LCN annual report needs to be drafted, which will be presented at the AGM. The date for this has been set for Thursday 6 June.

11. **Dates and Venues for meetings going forward**

A public meeting to update communities on the B3224 Roundwater Scheme to be held at the Moorland Hall on Wednesday 13 March. Doors open at 7pm for a start at 7.30pm.

| Exmoor LCN Date – The Moorland Hall, Cutcombe | Proposed Highways Sub-Group Date – Dulverton Sports Pavilion |
|---|---|
| Thursday 7 March 2024 at 7pm | Friday 19 April 2024, at 10am. |
| Thursday 9 May 2024 at 7pm – special meeting. (Not hybrid) | |
| AGM – Thursday 6 June 2024 at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed | |

12. **Meeting closed at 1:00pm**